

Herbal Medications

As the use of herbal preparations becomes more prevalent in treating a wide array of conditions, we are seeing an increase in requests to administer these preparations to children in schools. Since there has been little research to document the effectiveness of herbal products, especially related to children, caution should be used to assure the safety of students. Just as with any medication, herbal preparations have a physiological effect on the body, can cause adverse effects, and interact with other medications.

It is critical for school districts to address the use of these products in their medication policies and procedures. The development of policies should address the same issues that are in place for prescription and nonprescription medications. The school nurse must be able to determine:

- The symptom(s) for which the preparation is being given;
- Potential for toxicity or interactions, particularly in children;
- The dosage ordered and whether dosage guidelines exist for the student's age and/or weight;
- That there is a legitimate indication for the recommended remedy; and
- What national standards recommend and the state's nurse practice act and school policy require when herbal preparations are administered to students by individuals who are not their parents (Dockrell & Leever, 2000).

School nurses must be aware of the types of herbal preparations that are being recommended and have resources available to reference these products. If the same information required for prescription and nonprescription medications is not available in regard to herbal preparations, district policy should support the school nurse in using professional judgment to refuse to administer the herbal preparation. Requests to administer herbal remedies offer opportunities for school nurses to educate students, parents, and school staff about the risks involved in administering products for which no safety parameters have been established, the importance of adequate research to determine the effects of herbal

preparations, and the rationale for schools to establish guidelines intended to assure the safety of all students (Schwab, 2001).

References

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